

Montana VR Council Meeting Minutes July 14-15, 2008

Vocational Rehabilitation Council
July 14-15, 2008
Board of Investments Conference Room
Helena, Montana

Members present: Dan Burke, Denise Corrao, Nina Cramer, Dalayna Faught, Mary Hall, Maureen Kenneally, Sharla LaFountain, Christina Mattlin, Ron Mills, Dick Trerise, Michelle Williamson, Lynn Winslow, Mavis Young Bear

Members absent: Jackie Colombe, Faith Dawson, Andrea Falcon, Carol Lambert, Paul Pearson, Ruth Straley, Claudette Vance

Staff and guests present: Peggy Williams, Joe Mathews, Barb Varnum, Bev Berg, Brigitte Winfield, Barb Schiedermayer, Justus Wendland (Secretary of State Office)

Monday, July 14

The big picture

Joe Mathews thanked the Council members for their involvement with the federal review. The federal staff were looking at compliance issues and best practices. Montana had no compliance issues. VR received the first draft of the report which contained three recommendations: (1) in the area of Independent Living, they recommended that the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and the agency might be collaborating too much and the SILC should be doing its own minutes; (2) they thought VR should analyze why so many consumers drop out after they are determined eligible and before they write their rehabilitation plan; (3) in the area of transitions (after high school), they thought VR needed to be doing more. The final report will be sent during August. Council members agreed the data report from the federal staff at the last meeting was boring and there should have been more of a dialog with the staff listening to consumer issues. Peggy agreed to follow up with information on which populations seem to be dropping out more frequently.

On the staff front, Bob Jahner has retired, and Barb Varnum was hired to take his place.

The Executive Planning Process did not allow many new requests to be included in the Governor's budget. Although this is an ongoing process, the Governor's office thinks most of the budget surplus will be used to keep current programs running at the same level as they now are.

Demonstration of voting machine (adapted for visually impaired)

Justus Wendland, from the Secretary of State's Office, demonstrated a voting machine that can be used by low vision and blind voters. Actually, the machine is available for anyone's use. In Montana, each polling place and each election office has one of these voting machines.

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) training report

Peggy and Dick attended training sponsored by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (federal government) on training for Council members. They set up a training website with 11 modules. Each module has a quiz at the end. To access the website, go to www.erehab.org. Click on “National Training Series” and then on “SRC Online Training Series.” You will need to register and set up a user name and password so you can come back to your work later. Instructions are included as Attachment A. Dick encouraged Council members to work on the training. Peggy went over the introduction and Series 1, Module 4---Role of the SRC, and the Council passed the quiz. Later Barb went over Series 2, Module 2---Purpose of the State Plan.

Transitions Powerpoint

Barb Schiedermayer presented the transitions powerpoint that gives good examples and answers many questions from high school students and their parents. The video explains the services VR can offer, the VR process, and contact numbers for more information.

Dan Burke mentioned that the University of Montana’s transition class was cancelled because of lack of interest, but they are working on developing a class on line. Dick mentioned that more people are attending IEP (Individual Education Plan) meetings by phone.

Committee meetings and report

Separate committee meetings were not held, because the Council as a whole had just discussed transitions. So the entire Council discussed the PR committee’s award ideas. We have a nomination form that can be returned to Peggy. So far, we have 5 nominations, and we have agreed to give out two awards. We discussed how often to give the awards, so that the award is coveted and not just something to do. We discussed honoring businesses that have excelled “consistently over the years.” We discussed getting nominations sent in two weeks before the Council meeting so that the PR committee could see them ahead of time. [Since we have 5 nominations, and we’ve already agreed on 2 awards, we don’t need to do any more for the October meeting.] Peggy is working with Jon Ebel, Department of Public Health and Human Services public information officer, on final press coverage. He would like us to be more detailed in our press release.

Tuesday, July 15

Consumer satisfaction survey

Barb Varnum talked about the consumer satisfaction survey. One of the duties of the VR Council, as stated in the federal Rehabilitation Act, is to survey VR consumers. Years ago, the Council sat down with Alan Davis, then a professor at Montana State University-Billings, and designed the survey. Alan used many “normed” questions---ones that in past research have proven to be reliable and valid; at the Council’s request, he also included other questions. Each year he reviews the data and provides a report for the Council. Barb reviewed that report.

The surveys are sent out monthly to all consumers whose cases were closed after they received services---both employed and not employed. The survey consists of satisfaction questions that the consumer fills out and then mails back to VR. This year VR had a 21% response rate—352 responses which were highly positive.

Alan Davis recommends reviewing the results with the regional administrators and with the VR Council. Dick said that OSERS (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation) makes them look at subgroups such as sex and ethnicity, and he thinks that may be coming for VR. The Council discussed how VR can get more responses, and suggested that the new staff person (taking Barb's place) look at other states with good response rates, and come back to the Council with ideas. VR and the Council have both discussed phone surveys in the past, but have decided against that because of limited resources. Barb will email out a corrected version of the comments, because the handout had some duplicates.

State plan update

Barb Varnum gave an overview of the state plan process. The state plan must be sent in every year by June 30. It includes both a pre-print section and a narrative section. Every three years the state must do a full state plan including a comprehensive needs assessment; in the other years, just the attachments are updated. Part of the state plan is the agency's strategic plan which Peggy talked about later. The strategic plan lists the goals and priorities for the VR agency; seven Council members met with VR management last year to come up with it. The plan was submitted on time, and VR will hear from the feds on its approval later this summer.

Field Services update

Barb Varnum stated that the agency will do a large case review in August, when representatives from each of the regions come to Helena and review cases from across the state. The case review will help identify training needs for the annual bi-district training. In the bi-district training, staff from two regions comes together for training. Since VR has four regions, there are two bi-district trainings each year.

Barb also mentioned a fair hearing she is involved in. A client has requested snow removal, house cleaning, etc services, and VR thinks those should not be covered because they are daily living services, not services necessary to get the client ready for work. The hearings officer has not ruled on the case yet.

Business Enterprise Program and Blind and Low Vision Services

Bev Berg updated the Council on the Business Enterprise Program. This program provides vending opportunities for Montanans who are blind. Currently there are three active vendors. Blind and Low Vision Services purchased four additional vending machines, and more are needed in Billings and Missoula. We are working on a Request for Proposals for running the BEP program. The current contract runs out on September 30. The new contract will be for \$80,000 plus rentals and commissions. This year the agency paid \$140,000. The review committee for the RFP will be a counselor, a representative from the Montana Association for the Blind, and Bev would like to have someone from the Council. Maureen asked for more details and said she would let Bev know. Lynn Winslow was tentatively volunteered.

In the Older Blind area, Bev said that we are out of client services money for this year. They may be able to use some money from Visual Services Medical. Blind and Low Vision Services started a new procedure of bulk purchasing magnifiers which will save the program money, both in shipping costs and in cost per unit when more units are purchased.

Strategic Plan Update

Peggy discussed the strategic plan, mentioned earlier as being the goals and priorities section of the state plan. Each quarter VR reviews its progress on meeting the goals. The evaluation is included as Attachment B.

Meeting structure

Dick discussed the idea of having an annual meeting structure where each meeting would concentrate on the same item. For example, the spring meeting could concentrate on the state plan; the summer meeting could concentrate on cultural diversity, etc. This would help the Council contribute more to the state plan development and other areas, as well as help with the long term sustainability of the Council. We need to get our core work done first. We want to be sure to get Council participation in development of the state plan, the Governor's Report, and the strategic plan. We need to improve orientation and training. Federal requirements will increase accountability. We can look at teleconferences between meetings and also use email. We also may want to look at our committee structure and develop a list of responsibilities and tasks for committees to accomplish. Peggy and Barb V will come up with ideas to start the discussion at the next meeting.

Governor's Report

We will discuss the annual Governor's Report at the next meeting. Dick and Denise volunteered to help with drafting it. VR will send an email out to Council members to see if anyone else is interested and to describe what the involvement would be. The group will come up with a rough draft for the next meeting.

Agenda items for next meeting

Meeting structure

Cultural presentation

Final report from RSA (Rehabilitation Services Administration)

Governor's Report

Regular updates

Attachment A
Instructions for Accessing Training for SRC Members
(ERehab)

2008 SRC Training Modules

Directions:

1. Access the website at www.erehab.org.
2. If your computer popup blocker is turned on, you will need to turn it off—click on Technology Requirements to figure out how to do that.
3. Click on National Training Series, then on SRC Online Training Series
4. You'll need to register and set up a user name and password. This is so you can come back to your work later.
5. You'll be asked to click to start the training. You must do the introduction module first.
6. You can choose whether to do the interactive version or the text only version.
7. There is a quiz at the end of each module. You must pass the quiz with 100%.
8. After you complete all the modules, you get a certificate.

The Modules:

Series One: Overview and Philosophy

- History of V.R.
- Overview of the Rehabilitation Act
- V.R. principles & policies
- The role of the SRC

Series Two: State Plan

- The Statutory Basis of the State Plan
- Purpose of the State Plan
- Development of the State Plan

Series Three: Operationalizing the State Plan

- Assessment
- Development of VR Goals
- Program Evaluation and Reporting
- SRC Infrastructure



Attachment B
Strategic Plan Evaluation
July 2008

Montana VR Strategic Plan

Evaluation--July 2008

Color Coding:

Teal—Evaluation 1/2008

Green—Evaluation 3/2008

Red—Evaluation 7/2008

1. Successfully assist people with disabilities to achieve their employment goals.

- Continue to meet the standards and indicators, our federal report card.

Central: Montana VR met all the federal standards and indicators for FY 2007.

- Continue achieving high consumer satisfaction feedback by meeting or exceeding 85% on consumer survey question #10, “In an overall general sense, how satisfied are you with the services you received?”

Central: The VR numbers have not yet been calculated, but the IL question, “I am satisfied with the services from IL”, had an 86.8% positive response rate. For 2007, the MVR general program had an 85% positive response rate.

- Refine our methods to identify unserved and underserved populations and how to serve them. Evaluate methods over the next three years on developing ways to measure unserved and underserved.

IL: Both IL and VR are concerned about identifying unserved and underserved populations. IL looked at youth with disabilities, Native Americans with disabilities, and Montanans with disabilities residing in rural counties. The 2007 data is as follows:

Youth with disabilities (% of Montanans with disabilities) age 16 – 20, 2000 census = 1.7%

Youth (18 – 22) Percent of IL cases served by Montana IL Centers = 5.5%

Native Americans with Disabilities (% of Montanans with disabilities based on a disability rate of 30% in the NA population) 2000 census = 15%

Native American percent of IL cases served by Montana IL Centers = 18.1%

Montanans with disabilities residing in counties with less than 6 persons per square mile (% of total Montanans with disabilities) 2000 census = 33.3%

Consumers residing in counties with less than 6 persons per square mile (% of cases served by IL centers) = 33.8%

- Make available a list of qualified benefits planners.

Billings: We have created a benefits planner list and introductory statement. As the names of benefits planners change, we change the list that is available for and given out to SSA beneficiaries. Note: Please do not discount the extensive knowledge about Social Security programs within VR staff. Having benefits planners should not decrease the need for VR counselors to have thorough knowledge of SSA benefits, their inter-reactions and knowledge of what happens or must happen when a client goes to work.

Butte: A list of qualified benefits planners has been made available to all counselors.

Great Falls: We have a list of statewide benefits planners that are available to our customers. We routinely provide printed literature on services available through the Montana Center on Disabilities and North Central Independent Living Services. Our customers are advised of this service at intake and throughout the VR process. This resource has proven to be extremely valuable when it comes to educating customers about the effects of employment on Social Security benefits.

Missoula: Flo Kiewel with Summit ILC in the Flathead is a qualified benefits planner. New staff in the Missoula and Hamilton offices of Summit will be trained in the next few months. Deb

Conwell of the WORC Center is self trained and has worked closely with local Social Security staff for several years. Annmarie Chambers who formerly completed PASS plans and benefits analysis has returned to offer that service. Flo continues to be the only “qualified” benefits planner. WORC Center is working with Home Community Based Services to see if HCBS can pay WORC to complete benefits analysis prior to referral to VR.

BLV: BLV uses the same disability planners as the other regional offices. All the counselors have a list of the disability planners in their regions.

- Offer referral to benefit planners (CWICs) at intake to new SSI and SSDI clients.

Billings: The benefits planning list and introductory statement are included in each new applicant package and are reviewed with SSA applicants.

Butte: All counselors have begun offering benefits planning to referred or active Social Security recipients.

Great Falls: Information on benefit planning services available to Social Security recipients is provided at weekly MVR informational meetings. The general information which is provided at our group meetings is followed up with more detailed information at the initial meeting with the counselor. Providing information about the service has become one of our standard office procedures. The benefit of accessing this information early in the MVR process is clear and it is something we will continue to do on an ongoing basis.

Missoula: In Missoula and Mineral counties, we are encouraging case managers of consumers in the mental health system to facilitate benefits analysis prior to referral to VR. Counselors find that providing this at intake is too much for consumers to understand. It is a conversation that happens at later appointments as employment plans are being discussed.

- Increase the percentage of rehabilitated consumers who have health insurance at closure. The 2006 percentage of rehabs with health insurance through their employment was 26.1%. The 2006 percentage of rehabs with any kind of health insurance (including Medicaid and Medicare) was 69.5%.

Central: In 2007, 239 out of 912 (26.2%) rehabs had insurance through their employer. The 2007 percentage of rehabs with any kind of health insurance (including Medicaid and Medicare) was 70.9% (647 out of 912).

Great Falls: Our region has provided counselors with training on how to accurately code successful MVR closures. Customers who are employed in jobs where medical coverage is available at the end of a probationary period should be listed as having insurance and other benefits at MVR case closure.

- Have CRP liaisons find out from placement specialists what the need, availability, and use of soft skills training is in their region. Also have the workforce liaisons investigate this.

Billings: During a regional staff meeting, we thoroughly reviewed where soft skills training classes are offered in the Billings region. (complete)

Butte: Soft skills trainers have been identified in the region, and counselors have been given information regarding soft skills in each office.

Great Falls: We gathered information from local One Stop Centers on training availability. We receive monthly fliers and e-mail distributions regarding the various soft skills training available. We are utilizing "Soft Skills Training" which is currently available in our region. Our regional Workforce Centers do an excellent job of making this type of training available to our mutual customers. We believe this need is being met and no further work will be done on this particular objective. (Completed)

Missoula: This is in progress.

BLV: This is in progress—again, BLV uses the same trainers as other regions.

- Train consumers in transportation options by asking the independent living centers to present travel training at each regional office every two years.

Billings: During a regional staff meeting, Independent Living (LIFTT) presented training on and we discussed transportation options in the Billings region. Both VR and LIFTT have representation on and participate in Transportation Advisory Councils (TACs). (complete)

Great Falls: The regional administrator regularly participates in Transportation Advisory Council meetings. Information obtained is brought back to regional staff. Our staff will continue to participate in our local TAC meetings. On May 16, 2008 two staff from North Central Independent Living Services provided information on travel training. (complete)

Missoula: The counselor supervisor, Mark Cumming, has attended community meetings regarding transportation issues and plans for the future.

BLV: Orientation and Mobility Specialists provide training to consumers in the use of alternative transportation options.

- Provide more access regarding new and emerging technologies by providing training at statewide events such as the annual All Staff meeting. Sources of training could be PLUK and the Rural Institute.

Billings: The Billings region is working on a pilot project for using video-phones or Polycom internet based audio and video cam technology for attending IEP meetings and providing training in rural schools. The system is up and running. It has been used on a trial basis with PLUK. Region III CSPD (public schools and OPI) along with Region III School Superintendents Association are planning a lunch and learn session to assist with the advancement of the use of video-cam technology in the schools. The lunch and learn will be held in the VR office.

Great Falls: Two counselors will attend the MonTech training in August 2008. The training should educate our newer counselors on technology options which are available for customer use. We continue to use Sorenson video technology to communicate with deaf customers. The program manager for deaf services is exploring other options to expand the use of this technology.

BLV: BLV hired an assistive technology specialist in fall 2007. Paul Suptic is pursuing training on the adaptive software and hardware for people with visual impairments. He will attend two workshops by Freedom Scientific in January. After this training, he will schedule a workshop for hands-on JAWS training for consumers and BLV staff. He will invite MonTech and MSDB staff as well. Paul completed the scripting and other training in adaptive software, and he attended the CSUN conference. Paul has visited each of the BLVS offices and he is planning a training session for August 2008 for BLVS staff and consumers.

Central: Brigitte Winfield, Bob Jahner, and Barb Varnum met with Kathy Laurin from MonTech to discuss expanded training and access to new and emerging technologies. MVR and MonTech are planning an intensive training for 2 staff from each region for August 5-7, 2008.

2. Assure that consistent, high quality transition services are made available statewide

- Continue identifying and communicating with students with disabilities in schools.

Butte: 01-16-2008 - All counselors and BLVS staff presented at, "Graduating Seniors Transition Career Expo". Approximately 300 seniors from Butte and surrounding areas were at this Expo.

Billings: We have distributed posters to schools as we have had contact with counselors, teachers and administrators. Some presentations have been given to individual high school classes. The most recent was to the high school in Huntley. More talks have been given to students and parents.

Great Falls: All counselors in the Great Falls region are actively involved in transition activities. Counselors understand the importance of "transition activities" and are aggressively working with school personnel and students on improving this process. We are giving

informational presentations to schools in all of our "travel areas", and here in Great Falls there has been an increase in the frequency that school personnel visit our office. All of our counselors keep a log of their school presentations and transition activities. We are making excellent progress in this area. Staff participated in the Family Learning Weekend at MSDB. Our regular contact with schools in the region has resulted in an increase in the number of students able to access MVR services as they leave school.

Missoula: Staff participate in transition fairs (parents, teachers and students) and attend IEPs either in person or by phone. The transitions counselor, Barb Schiedermayer, has weekly hours in three Missoula schools. The Hamilton VR counselor attended two transition events. Barb also made a web presentation on transitions sponsored by the Rural Institute.

Central: The Legislature approved funding for a transitions counselor, and that position has been hired in Missoula. On January 7, a web conference was held: "Montana VR—Navigating the Transition from School to Work". VR is also helping sponsor a transitions conference in September in Great Falls: "Transition to What?" Five VR staff will attend training in January 2008 on "Facilitating Successful Transitions for Youth and Young Adults with Brain Injury". VR administrative staff are engaged in the Governor's Transition Task Force and are working on the systems issues of transitions.

BLV: The BLV counselors in all regions have contact with the MSDB outreach workers and actively contact schools to let them know BLV is available for transitioning students with visual impairments. BLV participates in activities with parents and students attending MSDB in the vision unit to work on transition.

- Continue updating and maintaining VR liaisons with schools and the school contact list for transitions.

Butte: Has updated the list.

Billings: This has been done. This is an annual need, and VR needs to update its website. During the summer many schools change personnel, so the list will need to be updated in the fall of 2008.

Great Falls: The list of liaison contacts in our region has been updated. This list, which is on our website, accurately reflects the counselors responsible for individual schools. This was reviewed last quarter.

Missoula: This has been done.

- Continue relationships with OPI, PLUK, and MYLF.

Billings: A Billings counselor participated in the MYLF summer event. Counselors have talked about MYLF in their liaison schools. A Billings counselor will participate in MYLF 2008. PLUK is assisting with the Poly-Com project. OPI will assist with training of school superintendents in the Poly-Com project.

Butte: Some counselors have participated in MYLF.

Great Falls: Some counselors have participated in MYLF. Our staff has been proactive in distributing MYLF applications to interested customers, students, and school personnel. Pete Townsend will represent Great Falls at MYLF 2008. Bob Ellesch, Program Manager for Deaf Services, took part in the state leaders' summit in Helena, focusing on education and transition issues.

Missoula: A Missoula counselor participated in MYLF. A Missoula counselor serves on the MYLF advisory board and our transitions counselor is very involved with all players in the field of transitions (Governor's Transitions Committee, MYLF, Rural Institute, Missoula high schools). Three Missoula region counselors will participate in MYLF 2008.

Central: Joe and Bob have biweekly teleconferences with MYLF to coordinate activities. Brigitte is actively participating in the planning and coordinating of the transitions conference to be held in Great Falls in September 2008.

IL: IL centers have staff that work at MYLF each year. Last year staff from two centers worked at the forum as other center staff coordinated evening activities. PLUK and the IL

centers were included in a transition grant proposal developed by central office. The proposal was not successful.

- Continue to explore video conferencing for transition services.

Billings: We are continuing to explore this in the Billings region. We have found that the schools have lower access to technology than was originally thought. We are in the process of purchasing video conferencing equipment suitable for work with Polycom systems such as those used by SummitNet, OPI and universities. The Poly-Com project is discussed above.

Great Falls: This is a work in progress. We do have video conferencing capabilities in the Great Falls office which are used to communicate with our customers who are deaf. Two different devices are available. There have been issues with compatibility of service which we are attempting to resolve.

Missoula: We attempted to participate in an IEP in Eureka via video but the school system was not operating correctly. Staff in the Kalispell office will continue to explore the use of video equipment.

- Determine how many high school students we are serving, not serving, and who and where they are.

Butte: Counselors consistently ask school personnel about other students with disabilities who are not under an IEP

Billings: Individual high schools vary considerably in their transitions efforts. Billings region VR counselors keep in touch with their assigned schools.

Great Falls: When counselors visit their individual schools, they provide information on program eligibility criteria. This education assists in identifying potentially eligible transitioning students who have not been considered for VR services.

Missoula: Marvalee and the transitions counselor are gathering data on how many students we served last year and how many we are serving this year with a counselor in the schools.

Central: Mike has identified statistics on the OPI website showing the number of special ed students by disability in Montana. Note: Not all special ed students will be eligible for VR services, and VR serves students with disabilities who are not listed under special ed (504 students).

- Develop a public relation (PR) plan to reach students with disabilities, parents, school staff, and community agencies on transition services.

Billings: We are targeting each school and have begun by using posters and training. In addition to regular PR activities, we are emphasizing the use of written referrals with response feedback so that schools have clear documentation of having had transitions activity. This method also connects referrals more directly to programs.

Butte: Meetings have been held with all schools. Posters are being developed for distribution to schools as well as businesses. 02/13/08 - An article was placed in the Anaconda Leader regarding MVR and transitioning students at the Anaconda Senior High School. Posters have been developed and are being distributed.

Great Falls: All of our counselors are working diligently to contact students who could benefit from MVR services during transition from school to work. Our greatest challenge is in schools along the "Highline Area." Our counselor in Havre has done an excellent job of disseminating program information. She is working with school personnel to develop referral strategies that will ensure students access to VR services, even when it is not feasible for regular personal contact. She has found that communication and utilizing technology is the key. We plan to begin transition efforts early in the next school year. Counselors will make presentations at schools during the early part of the school year, hoping to reach a broad audience. PR material has been customized for our regional use and we are well equipped to deliver the MVR message in a variety of settings.

Missoula: Counselors in the Kalispell office and Hamilton office continue to attend IEPs. Missoula counselors and regional administrator attend IEPs when possible. In January the transitions

counselor began having regular weekly hours in each of the three public high schools in Missoula. She made a web presentation on transitions in early February; the audience included parents, agency representatives, and teachers.

Central: Each year at MYLF counselors from each region attend and are allowed time to meet with delegates from their area to discuss VR. Also each year Joe Mathews gives a presentation. In 2008, five field staff will participate at MYLF, with each region being represented. Additionally Barb Schiedermayer will provide an agency overview and Brigitte Winfield and Mike Hermanson will participate as MYLF staff.

- Invite a school representative to discuss transitions in each region.

Great Falls: Great Falls school district personnel from both Great Falls HS and CM Russell HS have been in our office during December to discuss current transition policies and procedures with our designated liaisons. Our counselor supervisor has also been part of those discussions. (Completed)

Missoula: The transition counselor will conduct a meeting (preferring to call it a “retreat”) with all high school staff involved in transitions. This has been difficult to coordinate.

- Explore transition programs in other states.

Missoula: The transitions counselor has attended national meetings and has met with leaders in the transitions effort. The Rural Institute staff keep VR counselors informed about transitions trainings and news. The Rural Institute has transferred some of its funding directly to a CRP (JOBS) to provide job readiness training and work experience/direct job placement to high school consumers. Barb Schiedermayer works directly with many of these consumers and cost shares with some.

- Hire a transition counselor/program officer to directly serve consumers and to develop transition practices. Determine if transition referrals increase.

Missoula: The Legislature appropriated funding for a transitions counselor which was hired for the Missoula region. She is working with the VR data person to determine the impact of this position on referrals to the VR program. Data will be available after June 30.

- Create a strategy for improved access in schools.

Billings: We are now emphasizing the use of written referrals and the use of a generic referral form. In this way, when schools refer a student, the information might be able to be tracked and a written response would be received by the school.

Great Falls: At regional staff meetings, we have explored ways to improve our referral process. Our counselor in Havre is working with schools along the Highline to improve the way that students are transitioned to VR services.

Missoula: Counselors from Missoula and Kalispell will present at a training meeting for special education staff of Mineral and Sanders counties on August 20.

- Develop urban and rural models of transition services.

Billings: The Poly-Com project is intended to be a rural model of providing transitions communication and possibly meeting attendance at IEPs in rural areas.

- Serve 20 high school students through MYLF.

Great Falls: Our staff has made a concerted effort to ensure that MYLF information and application forms are available for interested students and school personnel. These efforts should pay off with additional participation.

Missoula: Counselors present MYLF information to students, parents, and teachers. Chanda (Kalispell) also makes presentations with Summit IL staff.

- Coordinate annually with disability services offices at university level (regional level).

Billings: We coordinate regularly with the disability services offices at MSU-Billings and the schools in Miles City and Glendive. Usually this coordination is on a per student basis as issues arise.

Butte: Butte counselors meet regularly with Disability Services representatives at the various universities in the region.

Great Falls: We coordinate regularly with Disability Service offices at MSU College of Technology, the University of Great Falls, and MSU Northern. This past year, we attended the annual meeting of disability services coordinators which was held in Great Falls. In this quarter, we have made formal presentations on MVR services at MSU COT and at the University of Great Falls. These presentations were made by our Regional Liaisons to staff at the respective schools. We have also found that participation in CMT meetings improves collaboration. Last quarter, our staff attended an MSU-COT seminar to learn about the new programs and opportunities available to our consumers. During the summer a new disability services coordinator will be hired at COT.

Missoula: This is done on a case by case basis. There will be a meeting with disability services to discuss how the financial aid level is determined. We met with University of Montana staff in the business office, financial aid, student services, career services, and medical withdrawal offices. There has been confusion with financial aid and business offices and the other areas were more for awareness of their resources for students. A counselor with experience working in the student services area of a community college will be our UM liaison and will work with UM to develop better contact strategies. The transitions counselor will participate in the University of Montana Transition to College three day workshop in June. Missoula counselors met with various UM staff to explore services and later developed a checklist of contacts to be accomplished prior to starting classes. This was cancelled due to few requests to attend. Counselors will continue to inform school staff, students, and parents.

BLV: Counselors coordinate with the Disability Services at the post secondary schools where consumers are attending.

Central: Ellen Swaney of OCHI is on the Governor's Task Force. We will coordinate through this connection. We are discussing the idea of creating a model process for all schools.

3. Build awareness and understanding of VR services

- Educate legislators, consumers, and the general public on VR services by sending out quarterly updates through the Friends of Rehab email list.

Central: VR sent the following items to its "Friends of Rehab" mailing list: (1) update on the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (August 17, 2007); (2) link to web page of VR state plan and IL state plan (October 17, 2007); (3) copy of the VR Council Governor's Report (January 4, 2008); (4) information on the upcoming public hearing; (5) short update on the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant. Legislators sit on the VR Council and the SILC.

- Explore the potential of TV/radio ads, maybe collaborating with MTAP.

Butte: We have been exploring the possibility of having a senior or graduate student at Montana Tech develop a public relations campaign for the region. We are waiting for the program director to contact us.

Butte: The Butte office in coordination with MVR council member are developing a 30 – 60 second TV/radio PR spot.

- Invite at least one business in each region to do a presentation at a staff meeting.

Billings: Dwight Vigness, Human Resources Director of Yellowstone County spoke to the office on November 8. Issues covered included: use of handicapped preference, jobs available through counties, jobs that are hard to fill and ones that have more qualified applicants.

Butte: We met with the director of Kids Management Authority to discuss their program and to determine how we can help the underserved kids who are helped by that organization.

Great Falls: We have a close working relationship with Cable Technologies Inc. This company has employed many VR customers. The individuals that have gone to work with this company include many people with varying disabilities. We currently have four customers who are deaf and working as assembly technicians. The president of this company and the human resources director have been in our office to discuss employment opportunities with their company. Our staff have toured their facility. We have continued to work closely with Cable Technologies Inc. The partnership that has developed between this employer, our agency and MSU College of Technology has resulted in significant employment opportunities for our customers. Our staff understands the importance of "reaching out" to employers in our area and developing a strong working relationship. (complete)

Missoula: We have not had individual employers attend staff meetings this quarter, but staff are kept informed of employment trends based on information obtained at Job Service Employment Council (JSEC) meetings and Community Management Team (CMT) meetings. Staff feel a need for updated information from other service providers.

- Expand career fair activity in more communities (as an employer and consumer resource).

Billings: We participate in almost every job and health fair. For example, we participated in the health fair in Glendive, the job fair in Miles City, the Jobs Jamboree/fair in Billings, the Senior Health Fair in Billings, etc. During the next few weeks we will be participating in "Project Homeless" a career and service fair targeting homeless in the Billings area. We continue to participate in career fairs like the upcoming fair in Billings that usually has about 100 participating businesses.

Butte: We participate in all career fairs, health fairs, and job fairs. Career Fair presentations in Butte (03/04/2008). In Helena (04/02/2008).

Great Falls: We are currently looking for ways to increase our participation in career fairs across our region. During the month of October we did take part in an employer fair in Lewistown. This event was jointly sponsored by the Lewistown Chamber of Commerce and the HRDC. Our staff took part in a meeting and "field trip" to Malmstrom AFB. This event provided an opportunity to educate civilian personnel at the base on how our agency and consumers can help fill their unmet employment needs. This should result in additional opportunities for our consumers. Mike Mikulski did a formal presentation at the Nexus Treatment Facility in Lewistown.

Missoula: Both the Kalispell and Missoula offices have participated in the past and anticipate doing so again this year. A career fair jointly sponsored by the Missoula and Hamilton JSECs (Job Service Employer Councils) will be held at the Florence-Carlton school in March. The regional administrator continues to serve on the Missoula JSEC. VR participated in the Hamilton Job Fair in late March. The Kalispell VR office had a booth at the Flathead Career Fair in April, and had several inquiries regarding services and VR as a career.

BLV: BLV counselors, rehabilitation teachers, and orientation and mobility specialists participate in health and job fairs on a regular basis.

4. Develop opportunities for better jobs and on-the-job supports for people who are working.

- Inventory methods of supporting consumers on the job following supported employment closures.

Central: The regional administrators discussed this at their March meeting and came up with the following methods: (1) EE paying job coach on job site; (2) MH case manager can be on or off site; (3) DD provider; (4) private pay to CRP (CRP is signoff)—could be SS or PASS; (5) natural supports; (6) Medicaid (signatures from CRP and Medicaid).

- Expand resources for Extended Employment program by asking the Legislature for more funding.

Missoula: A new EE service provider, Winds of Change, has agreed to provide extended services and provide the long term signoff for eligible consumers of Winds of Change.

Central: On 2/22/08, Reg Gibbs sent information regarding the EE waiting list. VR will request more money for EE funding during the EPP process. MVR requested that the department consider the following in the EPP process: 1) a 2% increase for providers, and 2) funding for the EE waiting list to serve 50 more people per year (100 total in 2 years).

- Study and explore post-BA eligibility and educational opportunities.

Central: Bob Jahner, Faith Dawson, Dan Burke, and Janet Van Dyke have developed a model of decision making for the April VR Council meeting.

- Invite the National Business Network to present at the 2008 All Staff meeting.

Missoula: Consider the WorkSource Wisconsin program also

Central: We discussed an invitation to the national Business Network to present at the 2008 All Staff, and we decided against it as Montana does not have the large national employers typical of partnerships with the network. Brigitte is seeking a speaker to present on "What are employers really looking for and how can we fill the need?"

5. Enhance VR services specifically for people with mental illness, brain injuries, and learning disorders

- Require each region have a focus group on mental health issues.

Billings: At this time, we are participating in the mental health advisory council and we are setting up having a counselor out-stationed for a short time each two weeks at the HUB (a mental health drop in treatment and support facility in Billings). The focus forum is planned and individuals are being invited. Results will be available next quarter.

Butte: We held our annual focus forum on June 3, 2008 in Butte. The theme this year was Mental Illness and the Consumer.

Great Falls: We are working with our mental health center liaison to plan this year's focus group discussion. We had our Regional Focus Group meeting on May 7, 2008. The subject for discussion was, "Improving Job Training Opportunities for MVR Customers with Mental Illness." The report on the discussion was sent to central office. Our staff regularly collaborates with the Center for Mental Health. We have jointly developed a fee for service approach to funding peer support training. The MVR-Mental Health Peer Support collaboration is in follow up to the program which was funded through a grant from DPHHS.

Missoula: The PACT vocational person attended a staff meeting to discuss and refine the referral process. We discussed and refined a more specific referral process.

BLV: This is in the planning stage.

- Get baseline information on how we serve consumers with mental illness, brain injuries and learning disorders: #26s; wage at closure; service rate, geographic areas. Develop a strategy to address areas of weakness.

Central: We have obtained the baseline information for individuals with psychosocial impairments, brain injuries, and learning disabilities by region. Listed below is the summary:

Standard	1	2	3
	Received Services (26 + 28)	26 Count	Rehab Rate (Column 2/1)
Psychosocial Impairments – code 18	334	182	54.49
Traumatic Brain Injury – code 37	48	26	54.17
Learning Disabilities – code 34	113	72	63.72

IL: The IL centers are serving consumers with cognitive and mental/emotional disabilities as follows:

Disability	Percent of Caseload with this Disability			
	MILP	NCILS	Summit	LIFTT
Cognitive	25.7%	16.1%	11.3%	15.5%
Mental/emotional	10.7%	4.9%	12.8%	17.7%

- Encourage one counselor from each region to attend the NAMI (National Association of Mentally Ill) conference each year to help develop “pockets of expertise” within the VR staff.

Billings: We have pocket of expertise counselors participating in the NAMI group and the mental health advisory council.

Butte: A counselor did attend the conference.

Great Falls: We have a designated mental health expert, but that person was unable to attend this year’s conference. However, two other staff did attend the conference, and they shared information with other Great Falls staff. Pete Townsend is our Regional Mental Health liaison and designated "expert." He works closely with staff at the Center for Mental Health to ensure that our agency has effective communication with their various programs. As a result, we work effectively with Case Management, Peer Support, Day Treatment and other components the mental health service delivery system. Supported employment staff attended a recent VR staff meeting. We mutually agreed to provide cross training on a quarterly basis.

Missoula: Four staff attended this conference and reported back to other counselors.

Central: VR continues to provide pockets of expertise with pertinent mental health training. In October, fourteen VR staff from across the state attended the 2007 Montana conference on mental illness, “The Journey of Recovery”.

- Focus one state training event (All Staff or MAR) in 2008 on mental health issues. Find models and bring in representatives from successful programs.

Central: Several speakers presented on the topic of mental health at the 2007 Montana Association for Rehabilitation conference and mental health issues will continue to be addressed at 2008 training events. We had mental health presentations at the April 2008 All Staff Meeting.

6. Collaborate with other appropriate agencies and 121s to enhance outcomes for consumers.

- Write a letter to the DPHHS director stating how our needs assessment again identified transportation as one of the highest needs our consumers mentioned.

- Stay informed with what is going on with independent living and Montana Transportation Partnerships regarding transportation.

Central: IL and VR held a joint public hearing on March 5.

Missoula: We recently met with Summit Independent Living staff to discuss services and common issues, including transportation. Counselor supervisor, Mark Cumming, attended community input sessions on transportation and economic development, and he presented that information to staff.

Statewide: (2nd Quarter) The Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Program, Rural Institute and Independent Living Centers across the State are working jointly on the "Working Well with a Disability Project." This study may produce a product that will improve health, wellness and employment outcomes for VR Customers in Montana and across the United States. A

secondary byproduct of this project is improved collaboration between the agencies involved.

IL: A report on the activities of the Transportation Partnership is scheduled for each meeting of the SILC.

- Work with 121 projects to determine needs and alignment with VR. Barb will contact the 121s and ask for input regarding the needs on their respective Reservations.

Billings: We are actively advising and coordinating with the Northern Cheyenne 121.

Great Falls: We work with all the 121 Projects. The Blackfeet Manpower Program has recently been certified as the first One Stop Center on a Reservation. We have an excellent working relationship with this center and are seeking ways to increase services that are available to our joint customers. Staff turnover at the Workforce Center in Browning has impacted our ability to increase placement referrals and collaborate on joint cases. We continue to work on improving service delivery in that area. The Counselor in our Havre Office travels to all of the Reservations located in her territory and has developed good working relationships with 121 Project Staff.

Missoula: The counselor serving the Flathead Reservation recently met with staff of the tribal VR program to discuss how both programs can work together more effectively. Barb Varnum presented to Missoula staff on 121s and how we coordinate with them. Chanda (Kalispell) connected by phone. Missoula VR is still attempting to schedule a meeting with the Missoula Indian Center.

Central: The 121s were contacted in April 2007 for input regarding the needs on their respective Reservations, and this information was included in the comprehensive needs assessment for the FY2008 state plan. They will be contacted in 2009 regarding their respective needs.

- Maintain joint training with 121 projects. Barb will continue to notify the 121 projects about training opportunities such as All Staff, MAR conference, CTAT training opportunities, etc. Barb will send the 121 projects any updated information on the MVR counselor manual.

Central: Barb sends the 121s information regarding training opportunities on a regular basis (National Center for the Dissemination of Disability, CTAT training on TBI employment, Pathfinder Associates training on ethics, and the MAR conference. She sent the 121s the MVR policy changes on due process, MVR fee schedule, assessment and graduate training, and case filing procedures on 10/30/07. VR sent information on the All Staff meeting to all the 121s on 2/26/2008.

- Continue good relationships with all the 121s. Barb will visit each Reservation with a 121 project when invited.

Central: This fall, Barb visited Salish Kootenai and Northern Cheyenne. Barb gathered information from the 121s for a "121 Fact Sheet" that includes contact information, eligibility requirements and area served for each of the 121s. This was sent out to the regional VR offices.

BLV: Doug Robinson is teaming with MonTech, MTAP, and the Montana State Library to do a disability services day-long presentation at each reservation in his area. This has already been done at two reservations. BLVS staff in other regional offices will participate at the reservations in their areas.

- Provide technical assistance to the 121s when requested.

Central: In December, Barb visited the Northern Cheyenne 121 Project at their request to provide training regarding the Ticket to Work program.

- Continue participation on federal benefits workshops on Reservations. Barb will attend at least two federal benefits workshops per year on Reservations.

Billings: The Billings region has participated in all federal benefits workshops on Reservations in our area. We will participate in the “WISE” Ticket to Work and Benefits Training session on August 19, 2008.

Great Falls: We also have made presentations at several federal benefits workshops.

Central: Barb, Scott Tanner and Doug Robinson attended the Browning disability conference in October. Barb and Kathy Ryan attended the Fort Belknap federal benefits workshop in September. Barb attended the Fort Peck federal benefits workshop in April 2008 and the Browning federal benefits workshop in May 2008.

- Inform disability groups about progress being made on Medicaid Infrastructure Grant.

Central: An update on the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant was sent to “Friends of Rehab” on August 17, 2007. Barbara Kriskovich, grant director, will update the VR Council at its January meeting. This is also one of Independent Living’s focus areas from their 2007 symposium.

- Support inclusion of Medicaid Buy-In in the EPP process.

Great Falls: NCILS hosted a “listening session” to obtain feedback on proposals for the Medicaid Buy-In. VR staff attended this session.

Central: This is one of IL’s top priorities. VR also supports an EPP request.

- Develop or improve the Community Rehab Program (CRP). Barb will convene the CRP liaison group via telephone conference call four times per year to discuss CRP issues and possible solutions. Barb will contact the CRPs regarding what their needs for improvement are in FY 2008.

Great Falls: In preparation for moving to the 3-tiered rate system, our region hosted a breakfast meeting for the CRPs in Great Falls. At that meeting, we provided information on the new fee structure. We continue to work actively with our partners on improving services for our mutual customers.

Central: Five CRP liaison conference calls were held in SFY 2008: July, September, October, January, and May. Topics covered include: updates on CRP issues in each region, CRP data report, update on new CRP rates, and creation of “Frequently Asked Questions” regarding the new rates. The CRPs were contacted in April 2007 for input on their needs. This information was included in the comprehensive needs assessment in the FY2008 state plan. The CRPs will be contacted in 2009 regarding their respective needs.

- Identify and encourage additional CRP participation. The MVR/CRP rates committee will have at least two CRP representatives that serve on the committee. Barb will contact at least two mental health facilities in FY 2008 regarding their interest in becoming a provider for MVR.

Central: A letter was sent to all of the CRPs in March regarding the anticipated change to the CARF requirement. Feedback/ comments were encouraged regarding the proposed change. The MVR rates committee has completed their task of revamping the current CRP rate structure, which will be effective July 1. The group will meet one more time in October to assess how it is going, for both CRPs and counselors. The MVR/CRP rates committee has 2 providers (Flathead Industries and COR) that are represented on the committee. This group will meet one more time in October 2008 to assess how the new change in rates is working. MVR has contacted mental health providers in Havre, Libby, and Kalispell this past year. The Center for Mental Health in Havre is now a provider for MVR.

- Participate in employer associations such as Workforce Centers, Community Management Teams, and One-Stops.

Billings: We are part of a One Stop Center, and the Billings VR regional administrator is currently manager of the center. A counselor in Miles City is currently the chairperson of the Southeastern Montana CMT in Miles City. VR staff have been instrumental in writing agreements and MOUs.

Butte: All offices are participating with their local CMTs—some on a monthly basis, but most on a quarterly basis. The Southwest Montana CMT met on May 5, 2008 to begin preliminary planning for a training academy in the fall. Also, a new cooperative agreement has been signed. Cooperative agreements are being signed with Helena and Anaconda CMTs.

Great Falls: We have identified liaison responsibilities for all of the One Stop centers located in our region. The regional administrator or the designated counselor regularly attends CMT meetings and sponsored activities. Our counselors attend CMT meetings in their travel areas and the RA represents MVR at the Great Falls meetings. All of our workforce centers will be in the process of undergoing recertification during the next year.

Missoula: VR is represented on the Missoula, Bitterroot and Flathead CMTs. Janet Van Dyke continues to be involved in the JSEC. The Missoula CMT is studying ways to increase participation of members and include more employers. Hamilton and Flathead show good participation. Lake County is active but it is difficult for VR to join regular meetings. Mineral County may be dropped because of lack of participation.

BLV: The Billings BLV regional manager participates in the One Stop Center meetings.

- Establish a liaison with Department of Corrections and become familiar with their programs related to disability.

Butte: We are in constant contact with various programs related to the Department of Corrections such as: START on the Warm Springs campus; WATCH and CONNECTIONS on the Warm Springs campus; NEXIS in Lewistown; the Men and Women's Center in Butte and Helena.

Missoula: Brook has agreed to be the liaison. We have had difficulty connecting for a meeting.

- Continue inter-agency cooperation with OPI, Higher Education, and other agencies.

Central: We have cooperative agreements with many of these agencies.

- Meet with Job Service to understand their new role.

Billings: The Billings office meets regularly with folks from Job Service and Workforce programs. We have noted and have received training/guidance on new roles of Job Service like navigators and Job Service absorbing all dislocated worker programs. The most recent meeting was a joint meeting of veterans programs including Billings VR staff, VR Job Service reps, VA-VR counselors, and the Upward Bound program (meeting 3-5-2008). In Billings, VR and Job Service are located in the same building. In Glendive and Sidney, the VR counselor uses Job Service office space and internet connections (for AWACS and CaseE).

Butte: Has met in all office areas with Job Service through their CMTs (most recent 01/31/2008 in Butte), to discuss new Job Service roles.

Great Falls: We have an excellent working relationship with our Great Falls Workforce Center. Recently we met with their new disability navigator to discuss services which are being provided. We will continue to coordinate services so that more customers can have access to the array of services provided by both agencies. Our counselors have regular contact with staff at Job Service Centers across the region. . We regularly look for opportunities to provide "Cross Training." During the past quarter, staff members from the Great Falls Job Service have attended our weekly "Informational Meetings" and learned about the MVR Program. Job service staff attended a weekly staff meeting and provided information on resources available through the local workforce center. CMT training academies will resume this fall.

Missoula: The Missoula regional administrator met with Missoula Job Service staff and met their new regional manager. The Job Service disability navigator will attend a VR staff meeting in March. We will tour the local Job Service in April. This has been postponed.

- Continue participation in local Mental Health advisory councils.

Billings: We have pocket of expertise counselors who participate in the NAMI group and the mental health advisory councils. We continue to participate in the Mental Health Advisory Councils. The Billings local advisory council is floundering and bordering on being disbanded. We have a representative, but participation is limited by demand of the current LAC leadership. In our opinion, this group is not fulfilling its mission. We are working with our area AMDD representative.

Missoula: Staff will attend LACs in Missoula, Kalispell, and Hamilton. The regional administrator attends Western Service Area Authority meetings.

Great Falls: We are participating in LAC's in the region and also a Peer Support Advisory committee. Collaboration with the local mental health advisory council is an ongoing process. LAC meetings are held monthly and attended by the RA or counselor supervisor.

- Invite other agencies (such as Job Service, Mental Health, DD, OPI) to present at a VR Council meeting.
- Strengthen networking between VR and other agencies. In 2008, work with Mental Health and Job Service. In 2009, work with Veterans Administration and Brain Injury.

Billings: We are working on having a counselor work a portion of time out of a mental health location like the HUB. Billings VR had a joint meeting of Veterans programs including: Billings VR Staff, VA Job Service Reps, VA-VR Counselors and the Upward Bound Program. (meeting of March 5th 2008)

Butte: We have assigned a counselor to be the principle resource person with respect to mental health issues. We have designated a specific counselor to be the liaison with Veteran's programs throughout this region; and have identified Veteran's Representatives in all office locations.

Great Falls: Our commitment to establishing formal liaison responsibilities with agencies in our region has paid dividends. We have strengthened our working relationships with both Mental Health and Job Service. We have confirmed our liaison with the VA. During August, Grant Ellison of the VA will meet with us.

Missoula: We met with the mental health vocational person and a representative of the PACT to discuss the referral process and case coordination. Liaisons in Missoula, Kalispell and Hamilton attend the LAC meetings. Staff refer to the disability navigator.

- Arrange for workforce presentations describing living wage and benefits (what's hot and what's not) once a year in each region.

Billings: The Billings region approaches this issue in a variety of ways. In Miles City, the staff regularly receives job announcements and wage information, targeting local employment opportunities. By being in the One Stop Center, Billings office receives information about businesses that are closing and new businesses expecting to open. One Stop Center space (including VR) is frequently used as interview areas by new employers. Several people attended the governor's conference on workforce issues, "Meeting the Challenge, Montana's Workforce on the Move." This conference had the governor, business leaders, and economists presenting and was attended by many business and labor leaders.

Great Falls: We have arranged for Job Service to make a presentation at our weekly staff meeting during the next quarter. (Completed)

Missoula: Through the Missoula CMT, presentations on issues related to the economy, transportation, living wages, childcare, and growth are planned over the next four months. There is a grant opportunity with the College of Technology/Job Service/HRDC/Union/Chamber regarding energy construction training. Workforce presentations have been difficult for counselors to attend, so the regional administrator brings back information. A private meeting may be necessary. In Missoula the CMT is discussing focusing on workforce certification training.

BLV: When possible the BLV counselors attend the presentations at the VR weekly staff meetings.

7. Continue attention to in-service training and meeting CSPD qualifications.

- Continue to provide in-service training to staff so they continue to be qualified.

Billings: Staff recently attended: “Meeting the Challenge, Montana’s Workforce on the Move”; “Dealing with the Angry Public”; “Assertiveness Training”; Native American Empowerment Conference”; “Suicide Prevention”; “Rural Development Conference—Domestic Violence Prevention”.

Butte: We continue to encourage staff to participate in training, including the recent mental health training in Missoula.

Great Falls: Our staff continues to take advantage of in-service training opportunities as they arise. We have had counselors participate in several CTAT training sessions. Since we have several new counselors, they are all involved in formal Utah State master’s level coursework. This is a significant commitment of staff time. We have three counselors that are pursuing a master’s training through Utah State University, as part of their CSPD plan. We have another counselor in Havre who will begin this program shortly. In addition, we have made a commitment to regional training, emphasizing our Case E System and becoming more competent with existing technologies. We received computer training from John Sutherland, Information Systems Specialist, focusing on remote computer access. This training has resulted in VR Counselors being able to access case management data from remote field areas.

Missoula: We’ve had in-services with the VA Voc Rehab, frequently used psychologists, Partnership Health, and the Disability Navigator. One counselor continues with Utah State training, and two others will begin training.

BLVS: BLVS staff are encouraged to attend training available across the state. They are regularly informed of online and teleconference training available specific to blindness issues.

Central: We do an annual needs assessment each fall to determine the training needs of staff. The 2008 All Staff meeting held in April had presentations on veterans issues, mental health issues, and transitions.

- Continue to require professional development plans for counselors.

Central: We do this and review them annually.

- Continue in-service on new counselor training and training to remain current on disability trends.

Central: MVR Futures developed a new counselor training guide.

- Develop specific training on VR public law and policy for counselors. (Bob J will do this at bi-district).

- Provide conflict and mediation training for MVR staff including mediation techniques when a counselor has to say no. Also provide training on how to deal with consumers who are in crisis.

- Provide staff with information on employment trends (demographics, labor market, interagency linkages and changes).

Billings: We talk about interagency linkages at every staff meeting and participate in “round robin” exchange type training with 20 other CMT agencies and programs.

Great Falls: Our office receives regular emails and distributions from the workforce centers identifying employment and labor market trends.

Missoula: Staff are invited to attend CMT events and this information is also shared at staff meetings.

Central: Staff have access to information, but may require reminders or best practices training.

- Continue good succession planning program and prepare for upcoming retirements of senior management.

Billings: The Billings region has a practice of “participation by two” when possible. This way, strategic folk learn about giving talks, negotiating relationships and coordinating services on a larger scale. A staff person is participating in the Emerging Leader Training in Washington.

Great Falls: We have several staff members participating in management training through the state’s Professional Development Center. We also encourage staff to consider application for the Futures group. Two people in our office have taken part in the Futures group. During this quarter, we have had a counselor complete the "Essentials of Management" course through the PDC and also make application to the Futures Group. To assist with succession planning and facilitate a smooth transition, we ask our staff to be involved in tasks which will broaden their knowledge base and exposure. One of our regional goals is to provide as much "cross training" as possible. Pete Townsend has been selected as a new member of Futures.

Missoula: The regional administrator is currently on Futures; two staff have completed it, and one other staff has been accepted.

Central: We just began recruiting for the 7th year of MVR Futures. We continue to send staff to “Basics of Management” and the “Emerging Leaders” series

BLV: Staff are encouraged to attend management and supervisory training and apply for membership in the Futures group

- Continue cultural awareness activities including having a VR Council meeting on a Reservation, sending a counselor to CANAR. Look at the needs of urban Native Americans who do not live on a reservation.

Central: The July 2007 VR Council meeting was held on the Blackfeet Reservation. Six staff recently attended cultural diversity training in Helena, and a counselor was scheduled to attend CANAR but was unable to due to medical reasons. Barbara Varnum typically attends the mid-year CANAR conference, but was unable to do so in 2008 because of a change in positions. There was not enough time to send a counselor in her place. Depending on funding, a counselor will attend the annual CANAR conference this fall. The MVR Council was originally going to hold the July 2008 meeting on the Flathead Reservation, but this did not happen because the Tribal VR program has a new director and was not ready to host this meeting.

Great Falls: Our counselor in Havre, Kathleen Ryan, has indicated her desire to represent MVR at this year's CANAR Conference. She does work closely with 121 Projects in this region and believes that her participation in this event would be invaluable

Missoula: We are attempting to arrange a meeting with the Missoula Indian Center.

- Explore video conferencing for training.
- Develop a forum for sharing best practices among the counselors such as setting up a column in the newsletter.

Billings: We shared best practice information at our regional staff meeting on November 8, 2007. We talk about best practice on individual cases as they are discussed / reviewed in staff meetings

Great Falls: We have established an appointment schedule for counselor "Case Consultations" at our weekly staff meetings. We have found this commitment has paid dividends for all of our staff.

Missoula: We are trying to discuss “hot topics” such as transportation, dental decisions, and new resources at a staff meeting and then have someone write up guidelines and put that information on our share drive.

8. Expand our staff recruitment effort

- Analyze and determine optimal staffing needs considering job placement, transitions, travel, and number of cases.
- Enhance recruitment through expanding internships through Futures, participating in career fairs and making contacts with universities regarding employment opportunities. (Brigitte)

Billings: We have consistently had interns from the rehabilitation counselor training program at MSU-Billings. Last semester, we had two master's degree students who received training and participated in assisting with service provision to a full range of client services. One of our interns from last fall has been hired as a rehabilitation counselor in the Bozeman office. The Billings region has not had a counselor job opening in the last 3 years. The problems with recruitment in Billings are in the clerical support position where the pay rate does not seem to be competitive with most of the equivalent positions in the private sector.

Great Falls: We make annual presentations to classes at the University of Great Falls. These presentations provide information on the VR program and educate master's level students on opportunities for employment in the field of rehabilitation.

BLV: BLV filled the orientation and mobility specialist position in Butte with a trainee who started in January. She will take online courses, attend training at a blindness rehabilitation center and begin training in a master's degree program in orientation and mobility.

Central: The Futures internship project should be completed by late spring/early summer. Dan Gray is initially making the MSU-Billings contact and then getting back to Brigitte.

- Provide information on VR/BLVS as a career to high school students.

Butte: We have participated in job fairs, youth fairs, and youth awareness days at local schools to bring the awareness of rehabilitation to the public.

Missoula: Kalispell VR participated in a job fair in April 2008 where 7 high school students asked for information on careers with VR.

- Recruit and hire a Deaf Coordinator in Great Falls.

Great Falls: Bob Ellesch started this job in January 2008!!

More investigation and resources needed (reviewed annually)

- Make more time available between counselors and consumers.

Great Falls: Our staff is working hard to become more efficient in using our new case management system. We have made great strides in this area. The result of these efforts will be to increase the time available for counseling and one-on-one interaction with our customers.

- Provide more financial support for Business Enterprise Program.

BLV: MBEI was provided additional funding in October to assist with meeting past debts on salaries. BLVS is working with MBEI to provide additional assistance for purchase of more vending machines for federal properties on existing routes. Another \$10,000 was added to the contract in February 2008 for the purchase of equipment for vendors. An additional \$24,000 was provided to MBEI in June for the purchase of additional vending machines.

- Orient school administrators and guidance counselors regarding transitions and VR.

Billings: We work on this regularly. We participate in CSPD for schools in two regions. Billings, for example, is also providing training on services and transitions to schools—the most recent is training through Yellowstone Coop East which serves high schools in the eastern half of Yellowstone County. As mentioned earlier, a training session with area school

superintendents is being planned. Counselors have met with school representatives and provided training and support for transitions.

Great Falls: This is an ongoing effort. All our counselors do regular education as they work on transition relationships with their individual schools.

Missoula: The Bitterroot Valley has regular transitions meetings on how to move students to adult services, and VR participates. We are attempting to fashion any informational presentations regarding transitions to carry the same information and guidance. This is channeled through the transition counselor.

- Develop a video on orientation for vocational goal development to help consumers understand their role. Watch the consumer satisfaction survey to monitor trends on concerns with goal development.
- Continue development of new materials for consumers. Find websites to help consumers focus on the VR process, including interest/vocational inventories. Refer this strategy to the Futures application package group.

Central: We will discuss this in MVR Futures and specifically how we can use the packet to connect people to internet resources.

- Inform consumers about the VR process and the full array of services

Billings: Following the traditional rehabilitation model, counselors describe the VR process and discuss the scope of services during the initial interview and during subsequent counseling sessions and a one-on-one relationship is built. As a part of the Futures Group, a subgroup is working on a new folder/handout that describes the VR process, CAP, the scope of services, etc.

Great Falls: We continue to use weekly informational meetings to educate new customers about VR services and processes. We plan to use and modify existing public relations PowerPoint's for these presentations. This will allow all staff to provide a consistent message regarding the VR program.

- Develop more "natural support" for consumers requiring extended support.
- Train employers in how to accommodate, support, communicate, and supervise employees with brain disorders and other disabilities.
- Develop a three year public relations plan for each region targeting employers.

Great Falls: At our weekly staff meetings, we have conducted brainstorming sessions to identify and target key employers in our area. We plan to market our services directly to these employers and implement our strategy jointly with the CRPs in our area. We also plan to nominate local employers who need to be recognized for their individual accomplishments in support of people with disabilities as suggested by the MVR Council.

- Team up with private associations like NAMI to educate the public.
- Emphasize models and use of team case management; collaborate with other agencies, such as mental health case manager.
- Provide counselors training on models of team case management.

Billings: MVR counselors regularly meet with mental health case managers and their clients in an effort to form a team approach.